Applying an Appropriate Standard of Evidence in Victim Identification Policies and Practice in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand

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Date Submitted: September 14, 2023
Date Revised: September 21, 2023
Date Published: October 31, 2023

Originality: 67%
Grammarly Score: 83%
Similarity: 33%

Recommended citation:
Cauton, G.E. (2023). Applying an appropriate standard of evidence in victim identification policies and practice in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Thailand. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1(2), 6–15. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2023.0006

ABSTRACT

Human trafficking remains to be a bane in our time undermining economic progress and perpetuating inequities by setting vulnerable communities who fall prey to it further back. This vicious cycle increases the risk of re-trafficking for victims who escape, and leaves layered trauma experiences unaddressed. To counter this, labor-receiving countries need to connect human trafficking victims to social services that utilize victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches geared toward victim restoration. Often the first step in accessing these services is victim identification. However, officers of government frontline agencies with the mandate to enforce the anti-human trafficking law apply very strict standards in their screening method. The perceived outcome of cases in trial plays a crucial role in victim determination. Thus, there is the tendency to apply evidentiary standards appropriate for a court trial in victim identification. Such practice tends to be adversarial where the burden of proof is paced on the victim's shoulders. Utilizing the standards of evidence as a conceptual framework has the potential of shifting rigid procedures and processes. The standards of evidence framework can calibrate and adjust current practices in victim identification to the appropriate threshold in favor of potential victims of trafficking accessing and receiving victim-centered services.

Keywords: *Human trafficking, Modern slavery, Victim identification, Evidence, Victim-centered*

Introduction

Victim Identification has been an ongoing challenge in Southeast Asia particularly in countries where International Justice Mission (IJM) is implementing a justice system strengthening program to improve the public justice system response to better protect people in poverty against violence, in this case human trafficking and modern slavery. The form of modern slavery contemplated here is forced labor including human trafficking for labor exploitation. The impetus for this study is the particular challenge on the lack of guidance on the quantum of evidence or standard of evidence required for public frontline officers mandated by law to make the determination of whether or not someone is a victim of trafficking. In criminal cases, we recognize the standard of evidence required to be proof beyond reasonable doubt. In civil cases, it is preponderance of evidence; and in administrative cases it is substantial evidence. But what is the correct standard of evidence when determining victim status?

This paper focused on countries where IJM is implementing a forced labor slavery program, namely: Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Malaysia, and Indonesia. While IJM is currently implementing a different program in the Philippines, online sexual exploitation of children, it is included in this paper since the program still falls under human trafficking. These countries have been selected for this paper due to access to actual casework experiences from accompanying government frontliners mandated to implement human trafficking laws. This paper also looked into relevant literature to shed insights to answer this question. Anecdotal experiences of practitioners who support government response against forced labor and human trafficking were also integrated in the findings.

Review of Related Literature

Victim identification is seen as a process that consists of a series of interactions and involving different pathways that ultimately lead relevant authorities to the identification of victims of trafficking or presumed victims and referred for assistance. Victim identification is usually not a single event or interaction. It can be complex and can happen at different stages. For example, screening of potential victims can be made by NGOs or by frontline law enforcement officials such as police, border guards, and embassy/consular officials, among other frontline officers with such a mandate. Identification of victims can also be made by specialized police (or police units) after a finding that the crime of human trafficking has been committed. Procedural identification can happen when there is an administrative mechanism in place to determine who is a victim of trafficking for purposes of assistance and support. And judicial identification (by a court) may be sought or required in order to grant victims the right to seek and receive compensation (Chiang, 2022).

According to the ACWC Regional Guidelines and Procedures to Address the Needs of Victims of TIP state that the accurate and timely identification of victims is critical to their safety and wellbeing. It calls for standardized mechanisms and procedures to be put in place to guide and facilitate victim identification across the ASEAN region. It also observes that the idea of an 'ideal victim' who is passive and blameless, has been popularized and has done more harm than good. It leads to the false conclusion that victims who have not been sexually exploited or suffered any physical abuse as not having the 'right' trafficking indicators (ASEAN Commission).

According to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) laws of ASEAN member states do not generally establish a formal identification or referral procedure, nor do they refer to victim identification. These are usually dealt with outside the law. That is, through procedures and guidelines (ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016).

In the literature cited above, there is no particular framework using standards of evidence as a tool to guide government frontliners in their determination of whether a person is a victim of trafficking or not.

Methodology

A systematic approach was used to review and analyze relevant literature for practitioners in anti-human trafficking work in select countries in Southeast Asia. The methodology involved the collection of relevant literature, the comparison of policies and practices in the selected countries on victim identification. The literature included legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and the effectiveness of implementation. A thematic analysis approach was applied in the review and analysis. Casework experience of practitioners was incorporated in the findings for a more accurate assessment of policy and practice.

Findings

Regional policies and practices on victim identification

Table 1 summarizes the policies and practices relevant to victim identification in a country based on literature from ASEAN, US Department of State, and other country documents. ASEAN Regional Review, summarized in the second column, has not been updated since 2016. The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, and other documents and input from practitioners summarized under the third and fourth columns, respectively, are meant to update the information in the second column.

Table 1: Policies and practices on victim identification in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mayanmar, Philippines, and Thailand

Country	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016	2022 US TIP Report (US Department of State, 2022)	Relevant Country Documents and Input from Practitioners
Cambodia	- No formal procedures operating for the identification of victims and no national referral mechanism. - The Ministry of Interior (MOI) and Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSAVY)	- MOSAVY developed victim identification guidelines in 2017 - Law enforcement agencies' victim identification, referral, and repatriation efforts remained disparate and underdeveloped.	- National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT) Guidelines state that the persons responsible for preliminary victim identification shall include the local authorities (commune, district, town,

Country	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016	2022 US TIP Report (US Department of State, 2022)	Relevant Country Documents and Input from Practitioners
	both have the mandate to identify victims. - Typically, victims are only identified after they have escaped from their traffickers or been deported back to Cambodia by the country of destination. - With respect to its nationals trafficked to other countries, Cambodia accepts the status determination of the destination country for purposes of providing returned victims with support and assistance. However, competent authorities in Cambodia are required to make a formal determination of victim status before taking further action, such as investigation or collecting evidence to file a complaint	- Authorities penalized potential foreign victims for unlawful acts traffickers compelled them to commit, such as immigration violations. - the government prevents NGOs from representing individuals seeking formal recognition as trafficking victims. - Victims were required to approach the Ministry of Interior (MOI) for the formal identification needed to access protection services.	province/municipality), judicial police, Social Affairs officials, officials in charge of women and children and staff of civil society organizations working on victim protection, or officials of the royal gendarmerie in charge of fighting against human trafficking, especially officials at all levels of the national mechanisms designed to combat human trafficking. Note: Italics supplied for emphasis. In practice, practitioners from civil organizations report that their victim identification is seldom upheld by government authorities.
Indonesia	- Most victims are identified after reports to the national authorities (by the victim, by an NGO or even by the media). - The formal identification process for Indonesian victims of trafficking is done through interviews and observations. - State and non-state actors can all be involved in identification. - Detailed guidelines have been developed to assist in the identification process.	- Several government agencies continued to utilize comprehensive or systematized standard operating procedures (SOP) for proactive victim identification or referral to protection services. - Some observers expressed concern that the lack of SOP and the government's anti-trafficking infrastructure, which was under the purview of local-level police units and protection agencies who focused primarily on women and children, hindered the identification of victims overall and of rural and male victims specifically. - Due to lack of formal identification procedures, authorities may have arrested or deported some unidentified trafficking victims, particularly among vulnerable groups. - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) maintains an online portal and mobile application to identify	- There is a National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Taskforce led by the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Children Protection (MOWECP). It consists of 12 other ministries and agencies and ad-hoc non-governmental organization (NGO) members. The Task Force has a National Action Plan (NAP) that is endorsed and implemented under Presidential Regulation. The new NAP is being finalized (after a 3-year delay) and is to be implemented from 2023. - At the subnational level, regional taskforces should be formed and operational. This is where there is delay. Very few at the subnational level are in compliance in forming regional task forces. - A regulation issued by the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection includes identification under its general case management function. Identification is carried out when receiving

Country	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016	2022 US TIP Report (US Department of State, 2022)	Relevant Country Documents and Input from Practitioners
		Indonesian trafficking victims exploited abroad.	public complaints or victim outreach. Male victims do not seem to be covered by this regulation. - Other ministries also have SOP for victim identification as a derivative of the Regulation relevant to the National Anti-Trafficking Taskforce and consistent with the NAP. This would further be adapted to SOP at subnational level. The process of adaptation from national to subnational SOP is where there could be misalignment in the process of victim identification. The victim identification may also differ from one ministry to the other and between national and subnational.
Malaysia	- The Council for Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Anti-Smuggling of Migrants (MAPO) has developed a small, portable checklist of indicators of trafficking that frontline officials can carry with them while on duty.	- The government had victim identification SOP formally adopted in April 2020—to guide law enforcement officers to identify victims during official duties. - These SOPs are not systematically implemented nationwide, especially in rural areas and in the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak. - The government continued to focus most of its identification efforts on the use of large-scale police raids of suspected commercial sex establishments and factories suspected of forced labor. - Officials often relied on reports of abuse from embassies representing foreign workers, victims to "self-identify," or workers' complaints of non-payment of wages and other violations. - Police and immigration officers inconsistently applied victim identification procedures or were slow to identify victims, ultimately preventing some foreign victims from receiving protection	There is a recent amendment of the ATIPSOM law and the National Referral Mechanism has been updated to improve victim identification, among other things.

Country	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016	2022 US TIP Report (US Department of State, 2022)	Relevant Country Documents and Input from Practitioners
		services. - The government also did not adequately screen asylum-seekers and refugees for indicators of trafficking. - NGOs continued to report authorities treated potential victims identified during police or immigration raids like criminals. - Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (ATIPSOM) required the government place victims who were granted a court-ordered 21-day interim protection order (for potential trafficking victims) or a subsequent 90-day protection order (for certified trafficking victims) at a "place of refuge," designated by the Minister of Home Affairs. - Undocumented foreign trafficking victims had a considerably lower chance of obtaining protection orders compared with foreign victims who had valid immigration papers. - Moreover, officials' interpretation that ATIPSOM required a trafficking victim to be subjected to physical restraint prevented the government from identifying some victims and issuing protection orders to many potential victims	
Myanmar	- Victim identification is generally the responsibility of the specialist trafficking unit within the National Police. - There is a need to develop systematic procedures for victim identification (both for national and foreign victims). - There is a need for more systematic coordination between countries.	- Regime law enforcement authorities did not report if they screened for trafficking among vulnerable populations, including Rohingya, persons in commercial sex, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returning migrant workers. -The regime did not implement or utilize the National SOP on the Return, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Trafficking, which were formally adopted under the civilian government.	-The 2005 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law has been amended on 16 June 2022. There is lack of clarity in soma parts of this kaw. - The implementing guidelines and regulations are needed to clarify the implementation of the new TIP law. -The new law has a provision for the formation of community-based human trafficking identification teams. This is to improve the detection of human trafficking cases and assist in victim identification.

Country	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016	2022 US TIP Report (US Department of State, 2022)	Relevant Country Documents and Input from Practitioners
		- The regime reversed the deposed civilian government's policy not to charge Rohingya with immigration violations; the regime also issued a directive for authorities to resume detention and legal actions against the Rohingya, including imprisonment of up to two years with hard labor, on immigration-related charges.	- the Department of Social Welfare is tasked to propose guidelines relevant to TIP victim identification and care.
Philippines	- Victims of trafficking are commonly identified through rescue operations, interview screening at ports and borders, reports from embassies and consulates abroad, referral cases, and reports via calls to government and NGO hotlines/help lines. - In some instances, cases of trafficking are detected during case build-up of similar cases, discussion during meetings or case conferences and other similar circumstances.	- The government lacked a reliable mechanism to consolidate statistics on the total number of victims identified and assisted because of the different pathways of victim identification.	- According to the Referral System developed by Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), entry to the referral system is through various means to seek assistance and protection. Upon entry, however, their status as victims of trafficking has to be confirmed by the appropriate authorities. The identification of trafficked persons may also be undertaken by the designated Focal Person of the referral system. In this way, services to the victims-survivors are made more accessible.
Thailand	- Division of Anti-Trafficking in Persons (DATIP) under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) developed a pamphlet to assist frontline officials in victim identification. - To further assist frontline officials, there is a preliminary interview form for multidisciplinary teams (MDT), which include interpreters) to use during initial interviews with potential victims. The form has been revised and the new version has been in use since early 2016.	- Finalized a national referral mechanism (NRM) in March 2022 that authorized a 45-day reflection period allowing for the provision of services to potential victims prior to formal identification. - Finalizing implementing guidelines for the forced labor provision of the anti-trafficking law - Established a new trafficking victim identification center - Developed guidelines for labor officials to refer suspected trafficking victims to MDTs - Inconsistent and ineffective interviewing practices during labor inspections left many labor trafficking victims unidentified. - NGOs raised concerns that officials did	-A new law on forced labor is in effect. Implementing guidelines and SOP are in place for its implementation.

Country	ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016	2022 US TIP Report (US Department of State, 2022)	Relevant Country Documents and Input from Practitioners
		not screen undocumented migrants for trafficking, particularly those fleeing political instability in Burma, and often detained and deported migrants without screening. - Some practices hindered the ability of victims to recount their exploitation, such as allowing employers of potential victims to be present during victim interviews. - Formal identification by MDTs was necessary for victims to obtain a legal right to services, including access to the government's trafficking shelters. - In December 2021, the Department of Special Investigations (DSI) established a human trafficking victim identification center to accommodate potential victims and prepare them for identification interviews.	

International And Regional Standards

UN Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking has underscored the primacy of human rights and stated that, "failure to identify a trafficked person correctly is likely to result in a further denial of that person's rights" (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2003). In light of this, it would appear that one would be in better standing consistent with international standards to err in favor of identifying someone as a victim of trafficking in ambiguous situations instead of denying a person's rights.

According to a UNODC training module, persons may also be termed as "potential" or "presumed" victims of trafficking. Potential victims are people who have not yet been trafficked, but due to their vulnerability or other circumstances, are at risk of being trafficked. A presumed victim is a person whose circumstances indicate that they may have been trafficked, but no final determination has yet been made, perhaps pending further inquiries. In the interim they should be treated as a victim and immediately provided with protection and assistance (UNODC, 2019).

Relevant provisions of ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children Provision (ACTIP) (ASEAN, 2015): (a) Article 14(1) Each Party shall establish national guidelines or procedures for the proper identification of victims of trafficking in persons and where appropriate, may collaborate with relevant non-governmental assistance organizations, and (b) Article 14(2) In a case where trafficking takes place in more than one country, each Party shall respect and recognize the identification of victims of trafficking in persons made by the competent authorities of the receiving Party.

These international and regional standards, support making survivor services accessible for victims of trafficking with the least friction through the public justice system. In case of doubt, persons should be presumed victims and given access to protection and aftercare services. However, in practice victims often bear the burden of proving that they are in fact victims using a standard of evidence that is more appropriate in full blown trial of the case.

General Observations on regional practices on victim identification

In most ASEAN member states, victim identification and referral procedures are dealt with outside the law, often through procedures and guidelines aimed at ensuring those on the frontline are able to recognize victims of trafficking and provide an adequate first response (ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016). This is not an issue in and of itself. However, if victim identification is not anchored on international and regional standards, there would be a lot of inconsistency especially in the case of trafficked migrant workers where one country, usually the source country, identifies a person as a trafficking victim and another country, usually the destination country, identifies that same person as an immigration law violator.

Throughout the ASEAN region, the practice of victim identification is principally reactive: victims are not "found" by frontline responders such as police, labor inspectors, immigration officers, among others, but will generally self-identity to police or support organizations while still in their situation of exploitation or once they have escaped their traffickers (ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016). The present stringent process in victim identification further discourages those who would self-identify as victims of trafficking.

Based on country assessments, most ASEAN countries experience difficulties in identifying victims trafficked for forced labor (ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, 2016). This implies that the number of victims actually identified does not reflect the scale of the problem. Governments need to improve victim identification mechanisms. This is where victim-centered approaches come in. When governments apply victim-centered approaches, victims would be encouraged to report.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing review of literature, there is no reference to a conceptual framework on evidence that frontliners, whether working individually or as part of a team mandated with the authority to identify victims of trafficking, can use to base their determination. Non-government Organizations advocating for the rights of victims of trafficking understand how important victim identification is because it opens access to government-funded services and protects the survivors from being criminalized. Anecdotal reports received disclose that frontliners often apply a very high standard of evidence in making their determination. Observers have noted that it appeared victim identification is being made dependent on the outcome of the case or the likelihood of success should it go to trial. Following this logic, it would appear that the standard of evidence used in victim identification in practice is one that approximates the standard of evidence applied by the courts in criminal cases which is beyond reasonable doubt.

It is likely that frontline authorities do this without awareness on the standard of evidence utilized as articulated here. It is more likely that due to the lack of practical guidance on what standard of evidence to use in victim identification, they default to that standard which they are most familiar with. While done without malice, this practice is not victim-centered and has the effect of putting an unreasonable burden on the victims' shoulders.

Standards of evidence can be used as a conceptual framework to help people in authority to do victim identification move away from a singular standard of evidence that is rigid and unreasonably high. Figure1 explains the different burdens of proof standards for legal matters. Under this framework, the more serious the consequences, the higher the burden of proof standards are.

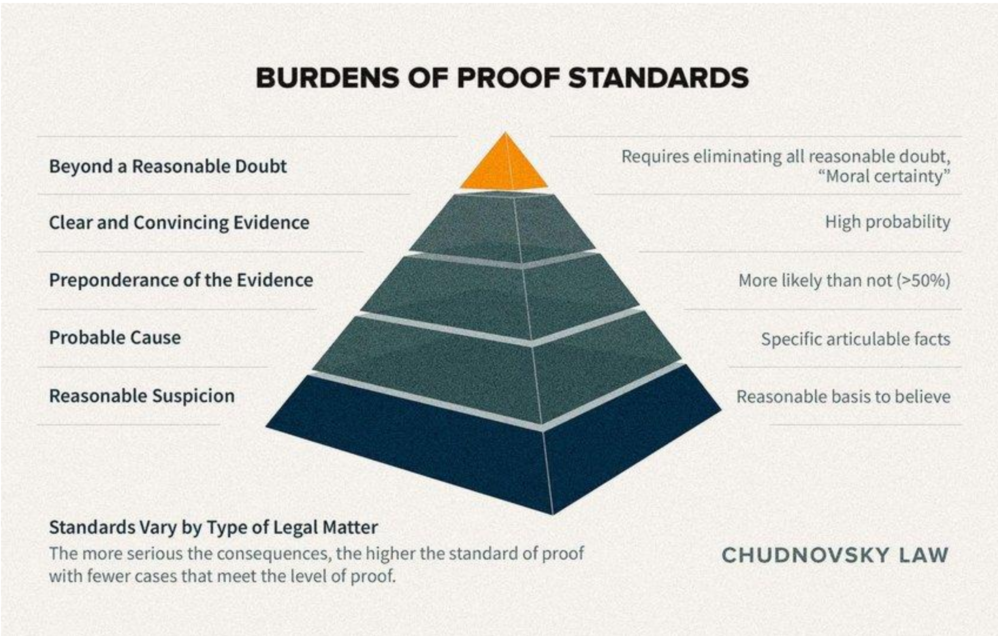

Figure 1: Burdens of proof standards (Chudnovsky, 2019)

Using this conceptual framework makes it possible to move to a different level of the pyramid, one that is more accepting of other means of verifying information other than that set forth in the formal rules of court.

Figure 2 is another illustration of the same concept. The smaller the ring or the hoop the stricter standard of evidence. Applied to victim identification, this means there would be fewer who would get through the hoop and pass as victims. Say for the Beyond a Reasonable Doubt standard, for every person who passes as a victim of trafficking, there would be so much more who would fail to meet the standard. But the same persons who failed to meet that standard would pass and be identified as victims of trafficking if another standard of evidence is applied.

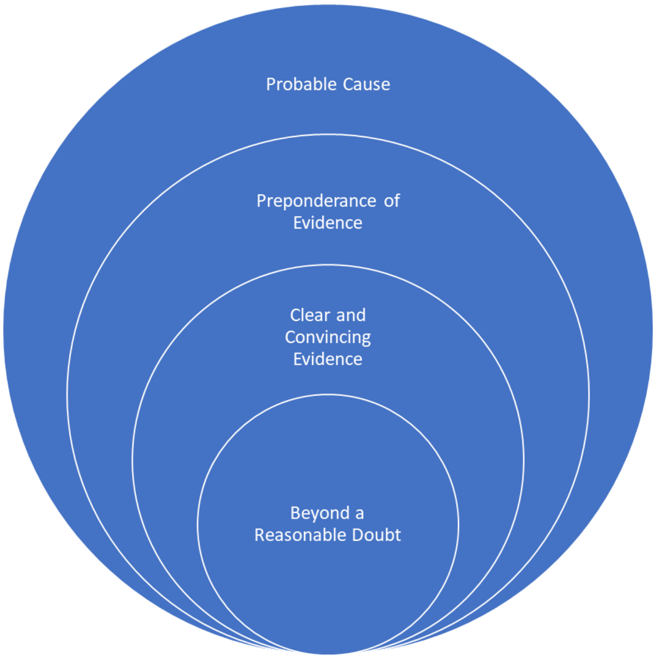

Figure 2: Standards of evidence

Here are practical recommendations:

1. In law enforcement trainings on trafficking in persons, include a module on standards of evidence that is specifically oriented towards victim identification. The goal is to first separate the standard of evidence used by courts in criminal cases from the victim identification process. Some practitioners assert that evidence should not even be an issue during victim identification. Certainly, evidence collection should be separate from victim identification in theory, but in practice these usually overlap if not considered simultaneously. A discussion of the standards of evidence in these two overlapping processes would clarify that victim identification should not be made dependent on the outcome of a case during trial such that only cases that are expected to succeed will victims be identified.
2. In many cases of human trafficking, victims who have escaped and are in a position to report to authorities are more concerned about physical safety than evidence collection. It is recommended that frontliners are trained to make a determination of whether someone is a victim of trafficking or not based on that person's statement if all they had was that statement. This would not preclude efforts to corroborate a statement if the means to do so are available to authorities. However, the burden to corroborate the statement should not be placed on the person who self-identified as a victim of trafficking.
3. Calibrate law enforcement response to reports and calls-for-help in situations of ongoing exploitation in the context of human trafficking or forced labor to be on the same as the response in any major crime requiring a speedy response.
4. It is recommended that agencies enforcing the TIP and forced labor laws reinforce this framework in their policies and standard operating procedures or SOPs.
5. Further study based on the findings of this paper is recommended to contribute to the strengthening of victim identification policies and practices.

Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the equal contribution in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

Funding

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

Acknowledgment

The author thanks the project advisory board and colleague at International Justice Mission Forced Labor Slavery Hub for helpful guidance and suggestions.

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Navigating Educational Management Challenges: A Case Study of Grapevine Communication Via Social Networks

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Date Submitted: October 21, 2023
Date Revised: October 30, 2023
Date Published: October 31, 2023

Originality: 89%
Grammarly Score: 87%
Similarity: 11%

Recommended citation:
Francisco, J.K. (2023). Navigating educational management challenges: a case study of grapevine communication via social networks. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1(2), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2023.0017

ABSTRACT

Employees exchange information and ideas through workplace communication. Effective communication is a crucial component of completing any task, whether it takes place in person or digitally, and is an element of an organization's internal communications efforts. Thus, this study aims to explore and determine how private secondary school integrates social networks as a tool for information dissemination and the effects of its integration in the workplace. The researcher used an illustrative case study design. From the result, two themes were revealed: Technology-integrated Information Dissemination and Traditional Information Dissemination. There are challenges and its results presented, such as miscommunication due to grapevine communication, a misinterpretation that can lead to conflicts and chaos, and late awareness of information because of internet connection issues. It is also stressed in the findings that traditional communication is still needed, such as a black-and-white document. These two themes affirm the aspects that will be reviewed to address how school managers integrate social network as a tool for communication.

Keywords: *Grapevine Communication, Social Networks, Information Dissemination, Communication, Educational Management*

Introduction

Technology plays a vital role in the educational system, it is beneficial in teaching and educational management. Good communication is a crucial tool for increasing productivity and sustaining healthy working relationships at all levels of an organization, and this has become more critical since the COVID-19 pandemic caused many individuals to work remotely. Communication in the workplace is vital because it promotes employee morale, engagement, productivity, and satisfaction. Communication is also essential for improved team collaboration and cooperation. Moreover, good workplace communication improves outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations (Campbell, 2022). Thus, communication is a crucial issue in the workplace. Effective workplace communication entails the creation and maintenance of a pleasant work environment.

In a recent study by Solomon (2016), from the 2,058 adult respondents in the United States, 1,120 were employed, and 616 were managers. It revealed that a staggering majority (69%) of managers are frequently uncomfortable engaging with employees. More than a third (37%) of managers indicated they are uncomfortable giving direct comments about their workers' performance if they believed the employee would react negatively to the feedback. This means that many managers find it challenging to be open and honest, acknowledge accomplishments, convey the "company line," provide clear instructions, give credit to others for outstanding ideas, speak to people directly, and have unpleasant feedback conversations in general. The statistics make it evident that workplace communication needs to be improved.

The assertion that effective communication plays a crucial role in the workplace is supported by substantial evidence. A recent study reveals that a significant number of workplace failures, as reported by 86% of employees and executives, can be attributed to ineffective teamwork and communication (Pumble, 2022). This statistic underscores the profound impact that communication dynamics have on the success or failure of endeavours within an organizational context.

On the flip side, the study also highlights that teams excelling in their communication practices may experience a substantial increase in productivity, potentially as much as 25% (Pumble, 2022). This quantifiable boost in productivity serves as compelling evidence for the power of effective communication in enhancing organizational performance and achievements.

Supporting these findings, The Connected Culture survey conducted in 2020 further emphasizes the critical connection between communication, productivity, and employee engagement. The survey reveals that a remarkable 71% of employees who reported higher levels of productivity also reported feeling connected to their coworkers (Connected Culture, 2020). This correlation between employees' sense of connection and increased productivity underscores the interpersonal and collaborative aspects of workplace communication.

It is evident that productive interactions and effective communication within teams are not coincidental; they are closely intertwined. The empirical data from these studies unequivocally shows that employees who engage in meaningful interactions with their colleagues tend to be more productive. This phenomenon is rooted in the fundamental principle that communication fosters collaboration, trust, and synergy among team members—all of which are essential for boosting productivity.

Conversely, it is crucial to acknowledge that the opposite is also true. Poor workplace communication, as affirmed by these studies, exacts a significant toll on organizations. Ineffective communication can lead to misaligned goals, reduced teamwork, decreased morale, and compromised efficiency. In essence, inadequate communication often results in a high cost, affecting both productivity and the overall well-being of a company.

The empirical evidence from these studies strongly reaffirms the critical importance of effective communication in the workplace. It underscores that communication is not a peripheral aspect of organizational functioning but rather a central determinant of success. Organizations that prioritize and cultivate robust communication practices stand to benefit from increased productivity, stronger teamwork, and enhanced employee engagement. Conversely, those that neglect this facet do so at their own risk, as the consequences of poor communication can be significant and far-reaching. Education is undergoing constant change, and good communication creates the supportive school climate needed to execute change (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Other than the interaction between teachers and students, the main relationships at most schools are those between staff, administrators, and parents (Wwieczorek & Manard, 2018). This is the reasons why communication must be smooth and clear to all academic and non-academic staffs of the school. The everyday lives depend heavily on communication, which is also essential in the job. People receive, send, and process a significant amount of news and information related to virtually any business or workplace every day in the modern era in which people live (Efectio, 2020). Quality workplace communication can help to eliminate unnecessary problems and promote better performance. The ability to communicate effectively at work can boost overall productivity and build a strong team. Employees will be more interested in cooperating and finding the best solution if they consult with one another and consider the perspectives of others. By creating good communication, managers can better understand the talents and skills of their employees, then give clear instructions to the people who are best suited to the task, thus increasing the overall effectiveness of each particular project. When teams fail to communicate effectively, the consequences are costly to the company. According to Gartner (2022) research, 70% of corporate blunders are caused by poor communication.

With the mentioned studies and contentions, this study aims to explore and determine how school managers integrates social networks as a tool for information dissemination and the effects of its integration in the workplace using a illustrative case study design.

Methodology

Research Design

In the study, the researcher used an illustrative case study design. It is a process for learning about a complicated situation based on a thorough comprehension of that problem, acquired by in-depth description and analysis of the problem, viewed as a whole and in its context (Baškarada, 2022). It is a case study that occurs in a scenario with an existing hypothesis or opinion. It is a case study that takes place in a situation where there is already a theory or perspective. The case study attempts to construct a typical case to grasp the current concept better. It is one of the most often used research methodology variants (PapersOwl, 2022). Illustrative case studies are also renowned for their descriptive nature. They try to explain every aspect of that specific topic in depth. In order to help the reader grasp the issue being described, it could even include one or two illustrations. In crafting an illustrative case study, the researcher started with a description. Then, the researcher tried to find connections between the subject of the text and external evidence. After establishing the evidence, the researcher concluded the study. The results of this case study revealed another theory's development and used concrete results for recommendations. The duration of this study was only a month. This research design is appropriate for the study because the researcher aims to explore how school managers disseminate information using social networks and determine its challenges and effects on the organization through a thorough comprehension of the case, acquired by in-depth description and analysis of the problem to provide conclusions and recommendations.

Research Participants

There were three (3) teachers from the high school department involved in the study. The participants were composed of two (2) seasoned teachers who had been teaching for almost five years and beyond and one (1) neophyte in teaching. Accordingly, no identity of the participants was revealed at all in the results. The names of the participants were replaced with code names such as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), and Participant 3 (P3). To maximize objectivity and to minimize bias in the selection of participants, purposive sampling was used. Also known as selective or subjective sampling, this technique relies on the judgment of the researcher in choosing and qualifying the participants. Researcher may implicitly choose a "representative" sample to suit the needs, and specific approach to individuals with certain characteristics (SLC Manual in Thesis and Dissertation Writing, 2019).

Research Environment

The study was conducted in a Catholic Educational Institution located in the City of San Fernando, La Union.

Data Gathering Procedure

To collect the necessary data pertinent to explore how school managers disseminate information using technology and determine its challenges and effects on the organization, the participants underwent video-conference in-depth interviews, since face-to-face interview was not feasible due to limitations brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and also the availability of the participants due to work demands. The interview sessions were recorded with the consent of the participants, and were set to last for not more than 15 minutes. A list of questions was formulated as a working guide to ensure all issues are covered (SLC Manual in Thesis and Dissertation Writing, 2019). To conduct the interview, the researcher used a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide based on the specific problem regarding information dissemination in the school using technology. Since the researcher used qualitative research, the researcher-made data measure is validated and approved by the internal validators and the school principal to ensure its fitness, accuracy of language, completeness, and other elements such as style, length, and sequence.

Table 1: Examples of questions from interview 1 to interview 3

Interview	Sample Questions
Interview 1	What are the practices of the school in integrating social networks as a communication for information dissemination?
Interview 2	What are the challenges/difficulties of integrating social networks as a communication for information dissemination?
Interview 3	What are the results of those challenges/difficulties of integrating social networks as a communication for information dissemination?

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis from the created themes. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method which involves reading through a data set (such a transcripts from in-depth interviews or focus groups) and identifying patterns in meaning across the data. The researcher culled descriptions from the verbatim statements. Afterwards, the descriptions were used to create sub-themes. Lastly, themes were made from the sub-themes. The participants' contentions and insights are validated through triangulation to coherently weave the main points and to determine the problems.

Trustworthiness

The researcher maintained the credibility of the study throughout the process. The researcher used triangulation to sustain the research study's finding's credibility in order to give a complete picture of the research problem. To ensure the transferability of the study, the researcher is confident that the study's findings apply to other contexts. The researcher used thick descriptions to show that the study's findings can be applied to other contexts, circumstances, and situations. To preserve the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings, the findings are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. Finally, the researcher used an inquiry audit to establish dependability, which requires an outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis to ensure that the findings are consistent and can be repeated.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of interview transcripts, exploring how school managers utilize Social Networks for information dissemination and gauging its challenges and organizational effects, has yielded valuable insights. These insights have served as the foundation for the development of an integrated model for information dissemination within educational institutions. This model, informed by the study's findings, highlights two central themes: Technology-integrated Information Dissemination and Traditional Information Dissemination. These thematic areas constitute the focal points for the forthcoming review, as they encapsulate the core facets under examination concerning how school managers incorporate Social Networks as a tool for information dissemination. Collectively, these themes contribute to the overarching objective of achieving effective communication within the educational context.

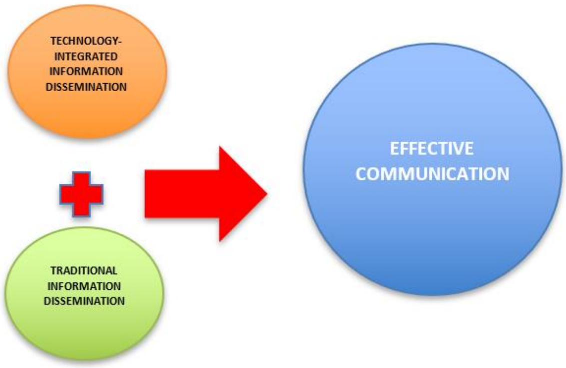

Figure 1: Integration of Social Networks in The Information Dissemination Model

Technology-Integrated Information Dissemination

The integration of technology within the workplace serves as a valuable means to mitigate disruptions to operations by fostering connectivity among employees, regardless of their geographical locations. This is particularly pertinent for those who work remotely or from home, as underscored by Madera (2020). In times of uncertainty, effective communication assumes paramount importance, serving as a linchpin for organizations seeking to safeguard their employees and navigate unpredictable circumstances.

A well-orchestrated dissemination of information not only ensures the efficient distribution of new knowledge but also serves to heighten awareness and promote collaboration. Promoting a project and its associated activities is crucial to ensure its visibility and success. Crafting an effective dissemination strategy, as outlined by Scientix (2022), involves careful consideration of several factors. The traditional avenues for disseminating information, such as weekly meetings and informal water cooler conversations, are no longer the sole or most effective means to communicate essential information to employees in a timely manner. The contemporary workforce is characterized by frequent travel and remote work arrangements, limiting in-person interactions. Consequently, having tools for information dissemination becomes indispensable, particularly for fast-paced organizations striving to outperform their competitors.

For thriving organizations, effective information dissemination strategies hold the key to enhancing employee morale, productivity, and financial performance. Communication takes on added significance in an educational institution, where students and parents constitute the primary clients directly impacted by the communication efforts of school managers. The quality of this communication profoundly affects stakeholder satisfaction; poor communication can have adverse effects on the educational experience and overall satisfaction levels.

In essence, the integration of technology and well-crafted dissemination strategies is pivotal for organizations aiming to maintain operational continuity, promote collaboration, and ultimately achieve success. Effective communication is not merely a nicety but a necessity, particularly within the context of educational institutions, where the satisfaction and well-being of students and parents hinge on the effectiveness of communication efforts.

Information Dissemination through Social Networks

The administrators of the school may effectively communicate with teachers using Social Networks by providing updates on the school's accomplishments on these platforms, hosting online meetings with teachers, and even introducing new initiatives and projects for the school (Mafilika, 2022). Different facets of our personal and professional life have been greatly impacted by Social Networks. Organizations have been concentrating on using Social Networks to grow and promote their schools, but they have ignored its potential to enhance and strengthen employee-to-employee relationships at work. The majority of school managers are aware of how Social Networks can improve employee collaboration and communication while bringing their workforce closer together. Social Networks platforms not only promote increased employee participation but may also streamline the information sharing process. The way school run has been permanently altered by COVID-19. This includes schools figuring out new ways to interact with their faculty, students, and the general public. Social Networks has been used by schools in the past to interact with their stakeholders, but now it is utilized more frequently than ever. The following responses are culled out from the participants:

"Our school employs GENYO (LMS), a Facebook group page, and Facebook group chats to distribute information." – (P1)

"Our school leaders primarily communicate with us through Facebook Messenger; email is not used for formal communication. Occasionally, we utilize our group page, but it's not the primary platform. We also rely on GENYO, our Learning Management System, for announcements." – (P2)

"Our school utilizes group chats, Facebook, Messenger, and occasionally email for announcements and urgent matters requiring immediate attention, especially regarding activities." – (P3)

From the aforementioned responses, it is clearly stated that school managers use Social Networks as a tool for information dissemination. Social Networks use at work has the potential to strengthen bonds between colleagues as well as between employees and students or parents (Casselbury, 2018). Work colleagues frequently perform better as a team when they have stronger interpersonal ties. Additionally, they could start to view their coworkers as friends, which might make them feel happier about going to work each day. This is confirmed by participants 2 and 3 that:

“The advantages of the Social Networks are the announcement is quick and we can immediately implement it. We can receive the message right away.” – (P2)

“There is an access to everyone wherever and whenever we are…” - (P3)

However, despite the advantages, there are challenges in integrating Social Networks as a tool for information dissemination. These challenges affect the school's operation since teachers may understand Social Networks messages differently. It can lead to wrong interpretations, implementations, and decisions that may directly affect the services of the school. Sometimes the usage of Social Networks can lead to grapevine communication. Grapevine is an informal channel of communication. It is called so because it stretches throughout the organization in all directions irrespective of the authority levels (Management Study Guide, 2022). This is affirmed by the participant 1 to participant 3 regarding to the casual and unofficial communication system within the organization:

"At times, unauthorized individuals make announcements in our official Facebook Messenger, and group chat members follow them without hesitation, implementing the instructions immediately. Unfortunately, the outcomes are often unfavorable. Many students and even their parents have complained due to misinterpretations of the messages." – (P1)

"It's a bit chaotic! Sometimes, we're not sure who to follow because our heads announce things differently when we're in the faculty. However, in our Facebook Messenger, the instructions are different, so we don't know who to follow." – (P2)

The above-mentioned difficulties emphasized that unverified information can spiral out of control and become even more impactful and untrustworthy when shared informally. Messages are frequently exaggerated in order to make stories more exciting (Trillian Team, 2022). Aside from that there are also other issues like internet connection issues. Social Networks applications and websites will only work through internet connection. However, not all employees of the school have internet. So sometimes, employees receive the information late, and it affects their productivity. This issue resulted to many problems as stated by the participants below:

“First is connection. Not all receivers of information may have an all-time access to the internet. Second is the urgency of the message/information. Sometimes, some of the recipients are informed late because they are not always online and has other matters at hand. This can also be traced back to the first problem.” – (P1)

“Sometimes our WIFI connection at home is slow and urgent information is not read, overloading of information and we don't know how to address, to follow, and what to prioritize, also opposing information because of too many leaders with different perspectives and the result of these-we are lost. Information dissemination is given during night time that distract our rest and sometimes we don't have enough time for the preparation of the said activity.” – (P3)

As stated above, miscommunication in the workplace refers to misconceptions that arise when teachers fail to communicate effectively, and their audience fails to comprehend their goal or meaning. This can lead to minor to major consequences (Write, 2020). The following are statements of the participants regarding the consequences of miscommunication in the Social Networks:

"If the information is incorrect, it can lead to confusion among the workers, potentially resulting in conflicts. It can also lead workers to complete tasks incorrectly. Conversely, if information is received late, workers may struggle to complete tasks on time." – (P1)

"Misunderstandings arise because different things are being implemented in the classroom, which can be very confusing. This affects the students, and we are the ones who have to face the parents when they complain." – (P2)

"There is confusion, a lack of follow-up, and sometimes chaos." – (P3)

The advantages mentioned above and the challenges of integrating Social Networks as a tool emphasize that it needs effective communication in the workplace. Social Networks is effective, but it must be appropriately used to sustain and maintain the connections within the organization.

Traditional Information Dissemination

In the era marked by the rapid ascent of modern technology and the digital age, the role of traditional communication methods in facilitating effective information dissemination remains undeniably significant. While the advent of the internet and digital media platforms has transformed the landscape of information sharing, it is imperative to acknowledge that traditional communication channels retain a noteworthy impact on organizational communication strategies. This recognition underscores the essential interplay between modern and traditional communication methodologies, necessitating their seamless integration into comprehensive communications plans.

A fundamental aspect of this perspective is the acknowledgment of the enduring relevance of traditional media in the contemporary information ecosystem. While the reach of traditional media may have experienced some contraction in the face of the internet's ubiquity, it would be premature to dismiss its influence outright. Indeed, the traditional media landscape continues to resonate with certain demographic segments and specific target audiences, making it a valuable conduit for organizations seeking to convey their messages effectively.

This viewpoint finds affirmation in the "BRT Planning Guide" (2022), which underscores the indispensability of traditional communication methods within a broader communications framework. The guide, likely rooted in practical experience, recognizes that modernity and tradition should not be regarded as opposing forces, but rather as complementary elements in the pursuit of effective communication strategies. Consequently, the guide advocates for the integration of traditional communication practices into the fabric of any comprehensive communications plan.

Scholarly investigations into the evolving dynamics of communication further substantiate this stance. While the digital revolution has ushered in an era of unprecedented connectivity and instant information dissemination, research conducted by scholars like Smith (2019) and Lee et al. (2020) highlights the continuing relevance of traditional media, especially in terms of its credibility and reach within certain demographic segments. This underscores the complex coexistence of modern and traditional communication methodologies, each offering distinct advantages in reaching and engaging diverse audiences.

In summary, the evolving landscape of communication in the digital age necessitates a nuanced perspective that recognizes the enduring significance of traditional communication methods. While modern technology has revolutionized how information is disseminated, traditional media channels still hold sway in specific contexts and among particular demographics. Thus, the seamless integration of both modern and traditional communication methods becomes imperative for organizations striving to achieve comprehensive and effective communication strategies that resonate with a diverse and dynamic audience.

Information Dissemination through Traditional Communication

Effective workplace communication stands as a cornerstone of organizational success, and it is increasingly evident that a harmonious blend of traditional and social network-based communication methodologies can be a catalyst in achieving this objective. This approach allows for a balanced communication ecosystem, mitigating the risk of miscommunications and fostering a more collaborative and efficient work environment (Write, 2020).In the realm of traditional communication, we observe the utilization of well-established methods that have stood the test of time. These include the exchange of black-and-white text documents, the dissemination of physical copies of memorandums, and the circulation of circulars. These conventional modes of communication, deeply rooted in established practices, continue to hold their place in the contemporary workplace.

The synergy between traditional and social network-based communication methods is essential in navigating the complexities of the modern workplace. By seamlessly integrating these approaches, organizations can harness the strengths of both, creating a comprehensive communication framework. This framework not only preserves the formality and clarity associated with traditional communication but also leverages the dynamism and immediacy of social networks.

Scholarly literature supports the idea that this amalgamation of communication channels is beneficial. A review by Garcia and Smith (2018) underscores how traditional and digital communication strategies can coexist effectively, facilitating both formal and informal interactions within the workplace. Similarly, Watson et al. (2019) emphasize the significance of adapting to modern communication trends while respecting the enduring value of traditional modes.

As organizations continually adapt to evolving communication paradigms, the incorporation of both traditional and social network-based communication channels becomes paramount. This duality empowers employees to select the most appropriate method for conveying messages, ensuring that information flows efficiently and effectively, all while maintaining a harmonious and productive work environment.

The fusion of traditional and social network-based communication represents a strategic approach to promote effective workplace communication. It bridges the gap between conventional and contemporary methods, accommodating the diverse needs of organizations and their employees. Grounded in scholarly insights, this approach recognizes that effective communication is not about choosing one over the other but about harnessing the collective strength of both paradigms to foster a thriving workplace. The participants state the following examples:

"It is better to have our own copy. They should not solely rely on social networks to make the guidelines clear from our perspective." – (P1)

"In addition to social networks, I believe school leaders should provide hard copies of documents. Even if announcements have been made on our Facebook Messenger, having our own copy ensures we fully understand it. It's more organized than relying solely on Facebook Messenger; it's different when we have a physical copy." – (P2)

"We should strike a balance and have physical copies! Facebook Messenger is too informal. I think for effective communication, it should be printed. Does that make sense? It's better that way." – (P3)

Communication technology, in the workplace, has elicited both praise and criticism, reflecting its dual nature. When employed judiciously and thoughtfully, it can serve as a pivotal component in enhancing workplace communication. However, amidst the proliferation of communication through Social Networks and digital platforms, it remains imperative to acknowledge the enduring efficacy of traditional modes of communication, such as black-and-white documents like memorandums, circulars, letters, and physical mails.

The seamless integration of Social Networks into information dissemination has undoubtedly reshaped the way we communicate within organizational settings. Yet, even in the era of digital connectivity, there is a compelling argument for the continued importance of traditional communication methods. Black-and-white documents, for instance, lend a sense of formality and clarity to official communications, ensuring that critical information is presented in a concise and easily digestible format.

Moreover, these conventional methods of communication carry historical weight and are often deeply entrenched in established organizational practices. Their reliability and permanence make them an indispensable tool in conveying crucial messages, policies, and directives. In this context, traditional documents such as memorandums and circulars serve as a timeless means of transmitting essential information.

Concurrently, informal communication channels within Social Networks, such as Facebook Pages and group chats, have carved out a niche in fostering workplace interactions. These platforms facilitate quick exchanges, enabling colleagues to connect, collaborate, and share information seamlessly. Nevertheless, it is paramount to exercise moderation and discretion in the use of informal communication channels to maintain a productive and professional work environment.

Beyond their primary function of information dissemination, informal communication platforms serve secondary objectives. They facilitate the formation of social connections, the building of organizational culture, the establishment of trust, and the discovery of common ground among employees. These outcomes contribute to a more cohesive and harmonious workplace, where individuals feel not only informed but also connected and engaged.

In sum, communication technology, when harnessed effectively, holds the potential to elevate workplace communication to new heights. The coexistence of traditional communication methods and digital platforms, each with its strengths and purposes, ensures that organizations can adapt to the diverse needs of their workforce. It is through this balanced integration that workplaces can thrive, fostering clear communication, productive interactions, and a positive organizational culture.

Limitations

The research undertaken in this study primarily centered on the integration of Social Networks as a tool for information dissemination within the workplace, with a particular emphasis on delineating the associated challenges and consequences. It is important to note that the scope of this study was relatively focused, concentrating on a limited sample size comprising three participants drawn from the high school department. These participants were chosen to represent a cross-section of a medium-sized Basic Education Schools population.

The selection of this specific focus and sample size was a deliberate choice aimed at providing an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon within a manageable context. However, the study acknowledges its limitations, stemming from its narrow focus and relatively small participant pool. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to a broader population or context.

In the light of these considerations, it is recommended that future researchers consider conducting more comprehensive investigations. These investigations could encompass both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to offer a more holistic understanding of the effects associated with the integration of Social Networks as a tool for information dissemination within the school environment. Qualitative research can provide valuable insights into the nuanced experiences and perceptions of participants, while quantitative research can yield statistical data that allows for broader generalizations.

Furthermore, future research endeavours might seek to broaden the scope of participants to encompass a more diverse array of stakeholders, such as administrators, teachers, parents, and students, across different educational institutions and levels. By doing so, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implications, challenges, and benefits associated with the integration of Social Networks in educational settings.

In summary, while the present study has shed light on the integration of Social Networks for information dissemination within a specific context, it serves as a stepping stone for future investigations. The call for more extensive research, encompassing a wider range of methodologies and participants, is essential to construct a richer and more nuanced understanding of this evolving landscape in educational communication. This approach will undoubtedly contribute to the development of informed strategies and best practices for harnessing Social Networks in the services of educational institutions.

Conclusions

From the findings, Social Networks as a tool for information dissemination is effective because teachers can receive the message immediately and collaborate and implement the command from the school managers as soon as possible. However, there are challenges, such as miscommunication due to grapevine communication, a misinterpretation that can lead to conflicts and chaos, and late awareness of information because of internet connection issues. It is also stressed in the findings that the traditional way of communication is still needed, such as black-and-white documents like memorandums, circulars, letters, and mail. These practices and challenges in communication are one of the major concerns in the workplace, specifically in the educational setting. Creating and maintaining a positive work environment is what means effective workplace communication. Communication can be formal, informal, modern, traditional, or go together as long as the communication is accessible and transparent. Moreover, within an organization, it is vital to develop a healthy and beneficial communication process.

Contributions of Authors

The author of this study is the sole contributor to the entire research process, including data collection, analysis, and the development of this work. The author and the Saint Louis College School of Advanced Studies have reviewed and approved the final version of the study.

Funding

This research project was conducted without direct financial support from any external funding agency or specific grant. The study was entirely self-funded by the researcher. All costs associated with data collection, analysis, and publication were personally covered. This funding arrangement underscores the independent and impartial nature of this research, ensuring that the findings and conclusions presented herein are free from any potential conflicts of interest or external influence. The researcher acknowledges their dedication and commitment to unbiased and rigorous scientific investigation, which remains a fundamental principle of this research endeavor.

Conflict of Interests

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest associated with this research study.

Acknowledgment

Sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks are extended to the people listed who have assisted and contributed to the completion of this study possible:

To Mr. Danilo D. Romero, Saint Louis College – BEdS Principal, for his unceasing support and approval of my study to conduct interview to the three teachers in the high school, and for his immediate guidance all throughout my study.

To the three teachers in the high school, for their generous participation and time to share their perspectives during the interview.

To my friends and colleagues, for their steadfast guidance throughout my graduate school journey, and for their moral and spiritual support especially during the difficult times.

Special thanks to Mr. Ezra Jair W. Busaing, Ms. Jolina May Viloria, Mrs. Jhanel Laigo, Ms. Angelica Mandap, Ms. Angelica Joy Marzo, Ms. Melissa Mhae Cortez, Ms. Jean Marie Resurreccion, and the High School Religious Education Faculty for directly helping and pushing me to continue & practice excellence amidst the difficulty of this pandemic and for the positive impact on my personal growth in the successful completion of my thesis.

To my dear parents, family and loved ones, for their unconditional, unequivocal, and loving support in this academic endeavour to finish successfully my thesis despite of this COVID-19 pandemic.

To all people who have supported and guided me directly and indirectly to finish this study.

Lastly, to Almighty God, the true source of my wisdom, for guiding me during the ups and downs of my academic journey. I offer this joy and success to Him because I will never attain this success without His unceasing love and guide throughout my earthly journey.

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Discrimination Experienced by Women Living with HIV and AIDS Accessing Reproductive Health Service

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Date Submitted: October 22, 2023
Date Revised: October 30, 2023
Date Published: October 31, 2023

Originality: 88%
Grammarly Score: 92%
Similarity: 12%

Recommended citation:
Tamang, B. (2023). Discrimination experienced by women living with HIV and AIDS accessing reproductive health services. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1(2), 26-36. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2023.0018

ABSTRACT

Women with disclosed HIV status experience different barriers and are stigmatized and discriminated against in health services. The sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV is critical when compared to those who are not living with HIV. Discriminatory behaviour in health settings decreases the morale of women and limits the care of their health. Women living with HIV hide their status because of fear of discrimination, which puts the health personnel at high risk of transmission. The goal of this study was to learn more about the reasons for and types of discrimination faced by HIV-positive women seeking reproductive health services in healthcare settings. The researcher found three significant findings. To begin with, pre-existing social attitudes, perceptions, and information regarding women with HIV are at the foundation of stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings. Second, the forms of stigma and prejudice that WLHIV perceived or experienced differed from each other, regardless of which service under reproductive health they sought. Finally, due to such discrimination, WLHIV refuses to disclose their HIV status, delaying or avoiding seeking medical help, experiencing emotional stress, and having low self-esteem.

Keywords: *Reproductive health services, HIV, AIDS, Gender-based discrimination*

Introduction

The Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act, 2075 (2018), states, "Every woman and teenager shall have the right to obtain education, information, counselling, and services relating to sexual and reproductive health." The sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV/AIDS is fundamental to their well-being and that of their partners and children. In Nepal, the estimated number of people living with HIV is 31,020, out of which 12,000 are females and 1,192 are children under 14 years (NCASC, 2019). However, there is a tendency for women living with HIV to be treated only on account of HIV, and often sexual and reproductive health is neglected. Key populations, including women and youth living with HIV, mostly experience discrimination and stigma in accessing sexual reproductive and other health services.

The Sustainable Development Goals and the Millennium Development Goals before them include the goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. The World Health Organization has released guidance overtime on the types of services to be included in comprehensive SRH care, including for HIV-positive women specifically. Women with disclosed HIV status are stigmatized and discriminated against in health services. The sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV is critical compared to others. Discriminatory behaviour in health settings decreases the morale of women and limits their access to care. Women living with HIV hide their status because of fear of discrimination, which puts health personnel at high risk of transmission (HIV Stigma Index, 2011).
HIV was a severe epidemic in early 2000 in Nepal. Many people lost their lives because of HIV, and many families were displaced just on account of HIV. Along with the discovery of medicine to strengthen the immune system of people living with HIV and awareness programs, the rate of HIV-infected people decreased. To this day, however, people living with HIV are not openly accepted. Women encounter various problems, such as violence from family members, verbal

abuse from society, discrimination in accessing health services, and the inability to disclose their status readily. The sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV is crucial but often neglected. Various factors come into play for the stigmatization and discriminatory behaviour, which limits women living with HIV's access to services (Kore, 2021).

The main objective of the study is to explore the reasons behind the discrimination in accessing sexual and reproductive health by women living with HIV and the types of such discrimination. The Nepal PLHIV stigma index report (2011) reports that almost half of the people living with HIV experienced at least one situation where they were offended and felt stigma and discrimination in their life after testing positive. One of the common and general ways such events occur is being "gossiped about" and making a major topic of discussion or action. In comparison with their male counterparts, females living with HIV experience more discrimination and stigma. The forms of such stigma and discrimination come in various ways: psychological pressure by intimate partners, sexual rejection, being ignored, rejected, and stalked. Due to their disclosed HIV status, women experience discrimination in different settings. The study explored the prevailing types of discriminatory actions in health settings, especially while accessing sexual and reproductive health services.

Methodology

Research Design

A descriptive research design was applied to analyze and interpret the qualitative data from the concerned field. A qualitative approach was used for descriptive analysis. When studying a phenomenon involving interactions and attitudes, using questions about how something is perceived, a qualitative approach is sufficient (Polit & Beck, 2009). The study aimed to examine encounters of HIV-positive women with stigma from medical professionals and other employees in healthcare settings. The area of research was the 'Right to Health Women' group formed by the National Federation of Women Living with HIV and AIDS. The researcher used both primary and secondary sources of data in the study. The researcher provided questionnaires to the informants and conducted focused group discussions as a form of primary data collection. Secondary sources of data included books, journals, reports, blogs, and newspaper articles written regarding discrimination against women living with HIV in healthcare settings.

Research Environment

The study area of research was the 'Right to Health Women' group formed by the National Federation of Women Living with HIV and AIDS. The study aimed to examine HIV-positive women's perceptions of rejection from healthcare providers during reproductive health checkups. As a result, the National Federation of Women Living with HIV's Right to Health Women's Community was selected as the study's setting because it was appropriate for the study's population.

Informants

One of the main criteria set for the study was that the participants were women living with HIV who were regularly under ART medication and seeking reproductive health services from a doctor. Reproductive health services included pregnancy care, contraception usage, counseling, abortion services, menstrual health, and any other reproductive health-related issues. To meet this criterion, informants had to be in contact with healthcare providers and institutions. The study universe comprised members of the 'Right to Health Women's Group' of the National Federation of Women Living with HIV and AIDS, representing various regions of Nepal. In this research, a woman is defined as any adult between the ages of 24 and 50, regardless of marital status. With these criteria, the researcher selected 20 members as informants and conducted in-depth interviews.

Sampling Procedure

The recruitment of women living with HIV was facilitated through the non-profit organization, the National Federation of Women Living with HIV and AIDS. There are ten 'Right to Health Women' groups located in different parts of Nepal. The researcher selected two participants from each group, totaling 20 informants for the in-depth interviews. The study employed purposive sampling as it focused on women living with HIV, ensuring that each member of the groups had an equal opportunity to participate.

Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a case study research design conducted among 20 women living with HIV who were selected through purposive sampling for participation in in-depth interviews. Additionally, a questionnaire was administered to 10 women living with HIV. Out of these, five were interviewed via telephone, while the remaining five were asked to fill out a Google form. Each respondent received a formal informed consent form to participate in the study. For those who required assistance, the details on the form were read aloud to them. During the interview, questions were asked, and oral consent was obtained prior to proceeding. All participants were informed in the consent form that they could withdraw from the interview at anytime. Given the sensitive nature of the study's topic, which involved participants' personal lives, it was recognized that discussing these matters could evoke discomfort or other negative emotions. To

address this, only women who expressed interest in participating and providing support were invited to be part of the study. The information gathered was processed and examined privately and confidentially.
The main topics of investigation were predetermined based on the study goals and qualitative results sought. These included exploring stigma, methods, and consequences of disclosure, adherence and potential apprehension surrounding disclosure, use of contraceptives, seeking abortion and reproductive health services, family planning practices and challenges, as well as experiences of discrimination by health providers.

Data Analysis Procedure

One-on-one interviews were conducted with ten women living with HIV, while five interviews were conducted over the phone, and five informants were asked to fill out Google forms. The interview questions were categorized into six thematic areas. Each area had specific questions, progressing from general to specific to facilitate analysis. The questions were formulated and asked in Nepali to ensure the comfort of the informants. Quotations, related passages, and memos for each topic were compiled into matrices, organized into categories and subcategories, and analyzed for prevalent themes and divergent viewpoints. These themes emerged during the analysis of questionnaire responses. For instance, common issues such as 'rejection, referral, and abandonment by others,' 'fear of being shunned,' 'name-calling,' 'self-isolation,' 'being prioritized after other patients,' and 'reluctance to visit the clinic' were categorized under the theme of 'stigma and prejudice.'

Ethical Consideration

The study's topic was extremely sensitive because it involves the participant's personal life and, therefore, can be difficult to discuss. There was a chance that the person may feel uneasy or have other negative feelings. This was considered, and as a result, the people who were interested were only asked. The information gathered was processed and examined in a private manner. Therefore, the researcher consulted with the National Federation of Women living with HIV and had a common understanding of confidentiality and respecting the women living with HIV's perception and experience and solely utilizing for the research purpose of the researcher.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are divided into different themes and analyzed accordingly. The themes are based on the demographic details, characteristics, and the types of services related to reproductive health.

Stigma and discrimination from health care providers while seeking pregnancy-related services

Table 1 shows the experiences of women living with HIV while accessing pregnancy-related services. The responses of the participants have been categorized into four themes, along with the direct quotes made by them during in-depth interviews. When analyzing the first theme, which is related to the attitudes of the employees in healthcare settings, most women living with HIV experienced stigma from non-medical staff when seeking pregnancy-related services. People in healthcare settings gossiped, made negative comments, judged them based on their HIV status and even stalked them. Similarly, another theme, accessibility of pregnancy-related services, indicates that, especially during the delivery of pregnant women living with HIV, the healthcare units are not as accessible as others.

Table 1. Discrimination while seeking pregnancy-related services

Theme	Discrimination	Sample significant statements
Attitudes	Judgmental communication, Gossiping, Physical Distancing	“Non-medical staffs of health care units gossiped about how can WLHIV give birth to child? She will also give birth child with HIV and it cannot survive” (Respondent 18, age 40)
Accessibility	Separate ward for lactating mother with HIV, Procrastinating appointment	“I still remember, after my delivery I was taken to separate ward and I was all alone, staff nurse hardly came to see me and ask about me, my husband had to call them instead” (Respondent 4, age 46)
Convenience	Denial/ Referring to other hospitals	“For counselling service hospital was open but directly referred to other hospitals at the time delivery.” (Respondent 10, age 30)

Confidentiality	Lack of Privacy	"Even though the doctors try their best to keep privacy other staffs at reception, lab and registration do not respect our privacy and leak our status." (Respondent 13, age 28)
Cost	Extra burden, charge extra amount for surgery items	"When my friend was hospitalized for her delivery, hospital told that they cannot use the surgical item which were available as it is for the other people without HIV, therefore they asked her to buy bed sheet, and all the other surgical items I guess they paid double as compare to normal charge" (Respondent 9, age 35)

Mostly, they are kept in isolation due to the perceived threat of transmission. Likewise, another theme on convenience states that for counseling services, healthcare settings were welcoming, whereas, during delivery or labor, women were often referred to other hospitals. Finally, the theme related to cost: many informants did not have much to say, but one stated that during her labor, she was asked to buy all kinds of items. All these types of discriminatory actions and stigmatization revolve around the cognitive model and its four defined potential reasons for discrimination. Around half a percent of WLHIV experienced stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings, not only from medical personnel but also from other staff in healthcare settings.

Case Story 1

"I have been infected with HIV for five years now. I have been married to an infected man. Like everyone else, we too desired to have children after marriage, so I went to the nearest hospital to have children because I knew that an infected person could not imagine giving birth without consulting doctors. I expressed my interest to the doctor, and he advised me to take various tests. At the test site, the employee told me with sarcasm, 'Why would an HIV-positive person want to give birth knowing that the child will be in danger?' While the doctors behaved well, other people working in the hospital did bad things, like delaying our tests, not naming names, spreading rumors about us, and backbiting. Sadly, it is very difficult for the infected to survive in such a society."

WLHIV faced discriminatory actions such as not being treated, especially in rural parts of Nepal. Doctors were often unavailable for treatment, and there were instances of invasive questioning about private matters, as well as inadequate attention to issues and problems. People employed in healthcare settings, like lab technicians, pharmacists, security guards, ward attendants, and others, also displayed poor and discriminatory behavior. This included not registering names and cases and calling names last when issuing medication.

Case Story 2

A woman living with HIV in her late 40s, whose husband died of AIDS, found out about her status when she went to a hospital in Dhangadi. At that time, she was four months pregnant. The doctor at the hospital inquired about her pregnancy. She informed them that her husband had died of HIV. The doctor advised her to take an HIV test, and unfortunately, she tested positive. The doctor explained that because she was not under ART medication, they could not treat her at that hospital. They advised her to go to Kathmandu. Being a single mother and recently diagnosed with HIV, she was in trauma. She could not share her status with others, as she feared they would abandon her. Consequently, she gave birth to her child, but sadly, it did not survive.

Stigma and discrimination in health care settings while seeking abortion-related services

Informants did not openly discuss abortion, and only one respondent reluctantly shared her experience with her friends and community members, indicating an apparent hesitation to talk about aborting a child. The gender of the interviewer played a significant role in the informants' willingness to answer the question. If the interviewer had been female, the scenario might have been different. Additionally, due to abortion being a sensitive and still largely unaccepted topic in Nepalese culture, the data related to abortion did not emerge as expected. However, abortion remains a critical issue, particularly in the lives of WLHIV. Because of their status, many service providers tend to neglect or refuse to perform such procedures.

Case Story 3

A member from Kailali attending the Right to Health Women's Group meeting discovered she was HIV positive after becoming pregnant. The group members advised and accompanied her to a doctor for counseling and consultation. After consulting with the doctor, it was determined that her viral load suppression was very high, and the doctor recommended an abortion. She was then referred to an abortion hospital. At another hospital, it was challenging for her to disclose her condition. However, as a group, they advocated for her and provided full disclosure to the doctor. The referred hospital also learned about her condition, as documented in the referral. The hospital clearly stated that they were unable to perform the abortion due to the high viral load suppression. Finally, she was referred to Kathmandu, where the abortion was conducted. Denial of services at the hospital significantly impacts the lives of women living with HIV.

Stigma and discrimination in health care settings while seeking family planning related services

As shown in Table 2, respondents experienced stigma and discrimination in the health care settings while seeking family planning-related services. WLHIV does not find family planning services accessible, respecting their privacy, non-judgmental, and in a healthy environment. Approximately half of the informants use contraception for family planning. However, most seek family planning counseling services as they believe it is unnecessary and that the service is not available in their area.

Table 2. Discrimination while seeking family planning-related services

Theme	Discrimination	Sample significant statements
Attitudes	Judgmental communication, Gossiping,	“I do not think that not only the woman living with HIV, but other women also cannot easily buy condoms and emergency contraceptive pills, the pharmacist and people around stares and gossip about women” (Respondent 12, age 35) “If I need contraceptives, I do not go where it is available in free of cost, I visit our own groups or organization because I fear about what people will say in public places.” (Respondent 13, age 29)
Accessibility	Avoided, Uncomfortable, Rejection	“While in a counselling session I was discomfort to notice counselors change in tone and way of talking after I disclosed my status.” (Respondent 17, age 40)
Convenience	Denial/ Referring to other hospitals	“For counselling service hospital was open but directly referred to other hospitals at the time service delivery.” (Respondent 10, age 30)
Confidentiality	Lack of Privacy	“I fear to disclose my status because though I trust the doctors and nurses but other employ at registration desk look at my file and delay my routine and tells others.” (Respondent 11, age 28)

One respondent stated, "I do not want to seek family planning services because I have to disclose my status for that purpose. Since most employees at the hospital are from my village, I do not think they will respect my status. I feel confidentiality will be just a name, and people will defame me." WLHIV live in fear that their status might be disclosed, and they will not receive the same level of respect as others when accessing services. On the contrary, two of the informants who were in the family planning process mentioned, "At first, there was a male doctor in the counseling service, and he did not respond to our queries. But after a female counselor came, they received family planning services in a much more considerate manner."

Case Story 4

"I needed a permanent means of family planning service. Since I was infected, two hospitals refused to provide me with a permanent contraceptive device. After visiting several hospitals, with the help of one of the organizations advocating for the rights of women living with HIV, in the end, one of the hospitals agreed to provide the service. Just being a woman living with HIV, it is difficult to access health services. I do not think other women without HIV have to face the same problem."

Experiences of Stigma and discrimination in Health care settings regarding reproductive health diseases

Table 3 shows that several informants indicated that they are at risk of reproductive health problems related to cervical, breast, vaginal, and menstrual issues. Participants felt uncomfortable sharing their problems with male doctors, fearing they might face double stigma due to their HIV status. Consequently, they chose not to disclose their status to service providers to avoid potential discrimination. One informant recounted her experience when she sought cervical cancer counseling, "I went to the hospital with a problem in my cervix. Initially, I did not talk about my condition because I was afraid I would be treated differently. After undergoing all the tests, I was diagnosed with uterine cancer and had to undergo immediate surgery. Then, my husband informed the doctor about my condition. Immediately, the hospital advised me not to have the operation there and instructed me to go to Kathmandu. It was very disheartening to be left alone because of my infection."

Table 3. Discrimination while seeking reproductive health services

Theme	Discrimination	Sample significant statements
Attitudes	Verbal insult, indifference of staff, lack of acceptance, look down	"Non-medical staffs of health care units gossiped about how can WLHIV give birth to child? She will also give birth child with HIV and it cannot survive" (Respondent 5, age 47)
Accessibility	Differential treatment, difficulties in disclosure of status, lack of acceptance	" When there is a male doctor present to treat the reproductive health diseases of women, it is really difficult to share problem and for WLHIV the rate of difficulty rises as they cannot share their problem along with disclosing the status" (Respondent 4, age 46) "The doctor who treats our HIV aspects do not look after our reproductive health diseases, therefore going to the specific health centers, we get differential in treatment" (Respondent 15, age 33)
Convenience	Anger in response, hesitant, late treatment, fear of getting disclosed in society by hospital staff	" I do not know why after disclosing my status and shared about my cervical cancer, there was anger in doctor's response and I did not ask him again because I was afraid." (Respondent 14, age 30)
Confidentiality	Lack of Privacy	"Even though the doctors try their best to keep privacy other staffs at reception, lab and registration do not respect our privacy and leak our status." (Respondent 13, age 28)

Many informants shared that during major surgeries, they experienced inhumane treatment from healthcare providers. The discriminatory actions took various forms, including demanding extra money for additional materials in surgery under the guise of precautionary measures, referring patients to other hospitals, claiming that surgical supplies were limited, and suggesting a higher risk of transmission to other patients. Additionally, some healthcare facilities allocated different wards for HIV-positive patients, causing delays in surgery and compromising confidentiality.

Case Story 5

A 33-year-old woman residing in Ramdhuni VDC got married at an early age. It has been six years since her husband passed away; her child is now 13 years old. She had a love marriage, and her husband was actively involved in politics then. He frequently fell ill and had to undergo checkups. After one such checkup at Biratnagar Hospital, he was diagnosed as HIV-positive and subsequently referred to Teku Hospital in Kathmandu. Unfortunately, her husband did not survive. During the testing, Sita and her child were both screened; Sita tested positive for HIV, while her child received a negative result. While she was saddened by her own diagnosis, she found solace in the fact that her child was not infected. Four months ago, she had a fall while washing clothes, resulting in injuries near her ovary and subsequent bleeding. She was taken to Matahari Health Center, where they stated their inability to provide the necessary care and referred her to Dharan B.P. Koirala Health Center. Upon arrival, she was promptly admitted to the Gyno Board Emergency. Due to her HIV status, there was a delay in her operation, but she chose not to disclose her condition initially. However, it was eventually discovered during the checkup process. Following this revelation, her treatment process slowed down, and she encountered disrespectful words from a nurse.

Causes of Discriminatory Actions

Linking HIV with immoral activity

WLHIV stated that they were vulnerable to public or communal stigma due to being infected with HIV and being women. Several WLHIV believed that they were being blamed for transmitting the virus to their husbands, and people questioned their character and worth. Many individuals in society held WLHIV responsible and cast doubts on their character. One participant explained that her husband suspected her activities and questioned her choice of friends, attributing blame for the transmission. Regarding healthcare settings, one respondent stated: "There are friends in our community who have been infected through involvement in sex work and drug use. There is a prevailing misconception that women become infected through immoral activities such as extramarital relationships, sex work, or drug use. Health providers are hesitant to serve us with this mindset. When a woman is infected, she must endure contempt and discrimination everywhere."

Fear of contamination

The majority of WLHIV expressed that they believed non-HIV healthcare workers' attitudes and behaviors reflected a fear of contracting HIV from providing services. One person described their experience: "I needed a permanent means of family planning. Since I was infected, two hospitals refused to provide me with a permanent contraceptive like Kaparti. In the end, they agreed to do it, but it was very expensive. The doctor asked me to buy gloves, a PEP suit, a mask, and other items. I had no choice and paid much money to get the service. I felt that they did this out of fear of getting infected themselves."

Lack of holistic knowledge on HIV issues

There is a significant need for understanding and awareness about HIV transmission among healthcare providers. The majority of WLHIV expressed concerns and worries about non-HIV care professionals and employees in healthcare settings. One WLHIV emphasized: "At times, there is no discrimination in the healthcare field, but reproductive health is a sensitive part of a woman's health. Some healthcare providers turn away from us because they do not know about the medication we take, the CD4 test, or the viral load test. Therefore, it is important to impart comprehensive knowledge about HIV to everyone working in the healthcare sector, including doctors, nurses, and hospital workers."

Lack of HIV-sensitive and friendly service

There is a significant need for HIV and women-friendly health services. The majority of WLHIV expressed concerns and worries about gender-friendly services. Participants highlighted that women's reproductive health issues cannot be adequately addressed by male doctors. They also emphasized that the lack of HIV-sensitive and friendly services hinders WLHIV from receiving quality care.

Lack of feeling of safety

Health professionals do not feel safe when treating PLHIV. They require personal protective equipment and other items for major surgeries and procedures involving blood. As is commonly understood, such items cannot be reused for other patients due to the high risk of disease transmission. Respondent 10 noted that the government does not guarantee the safety of health professionals, leading to a lack of a sense of security. Hospitals should allocate special suits, surgical items, and other necessary equipment to ensure the safety of all individuals seeking medical attention.

Consequences of stigma and discrimination

The major repercussions of stigma and discrimination, according to respondents, include unwillingness to reveal their HIV status when seeking care, poor self-esteem accompanied by emotional stress and sadness, and avoidance or delay in obtaining health treatment. At least one type of self-stigma, such as shame, guilt, blaming others, low self-esteem, suicidal thoughts, and a readiness to be punished, had been experienced by women living with HIV. This has directly hampered their day-to-day life, as they cannot easily access stigma-free services. One of the respondents shared her thoughts, saying, "I got infected by my parents, and now I cannot openly live my life like other people. My friend circle is limited, and for this, I am ashamed of my life. People question me when they know about my status."

Not disclosing HIV status in treatment

Due to past negative experiences of stigma and discriminatory behavior from people in healthcare settings, most of the informants stopped disclosing their HIV-positive status. Some informants reacted according to the situation. They would inform about their status whenever they wanted or felt it was easy to do so, especially in crucial medical situations. One informant shared her experience, saying, "I understand why hospitals take preventive measures while treating HIV patients like me, and such actions are not against people but for protection. However, even though I am under ART medicine, and while going for a regular medical checkup, employees of healthcare settings gossiped about me and stared at me. That is why, knowing the long-term effect of disclosing my status, I stopped sharing it whenever I visited other hospitals."

A pattern of seeking health service

The major pattern of seeking reproductive health services is that informants stopped visiting the healthcare units where they faced stigma and shifted to others. One informant explained, "Whenever I have issues with my reproductive health, I come to Kathmandu for treatment because the hospitals in my hometown do not treat me well. They also refer patients to Kathmandu, so before they order, I come on my own. Though it is costly for us, we do not have any choices. I wonder what other women living with HIV would do." Similarly, informants visited hospitals only when necessary so that they would encounter people for only a short time. Some delayed seeking services, and one respondent completely stopped going to the hospital to avoid discrimination. She stated, "It is better to not go to the hospital rather than be the topic of gossip."

Things need to be considered for making services accessible and non-discriminatory

Table 4. Suggestions to make healthcare settings more accessible

Themes	Sample Significant Statements
Policy and Plan	HIV bill should be approved, the laws should be updated and made gender friendly (Respondent 1, age 25), Existing policy on HIV should be implemented and issues of women living with HIV like sexual and reproductive health, livelihood must be addressed (Respondent 7, age 24)
	Universal Guideline on Medical Treatment for People Living with HIV must include the sexual and reproductive health aspect of women and made sure it is contextual enough to implement by the health care workers in health care settings. (Respondent 6, age 31)
	The provision of stigma and discrimination free health services should be provided in all parts of Nepal and should not focus on only Kathmandu. (Respondent 6, age 31)
	Providing free medicine is not only enough, program for other aspects of health should also be implemented by the government. (Respondent 20, Age 36)
	Well facilitated hospitals and qualified human resources should be there at least in a province which can treat all problems of women living with HIV and provide comprehensive treatment services (Respondent 2, age 37)
	Not only the ART site centers employees and dedicated doctors should know about the issues of WLHIV, all other government hospitals and primary health care centers medical and non medical staffs must be trained and oriented about the overall aspect of the PLHIV (Respondent 3, age 40)
Monitoring	In our provincial hospitals designated ward is there for women living with HIV and it is not livable at all, such things be monitored by NCASC and help to build better environment for over all PLHIV. (Respondent 8, age 36)
	Complaining mechanisms must be established in hospital and dedicated group should be created by the hospital administration to solve the problems faced by people living with HIV. (Respondent 9, age 35)
Collaboration between NGOs and Government	Care and Support Program and Community Based Care and Home Support Program are run by HIV NGOs, such programs should include the component like sexual and reproductive health. (Respondent 16, age 37)
	CHBC workers should not only focus on testing and finding new cases but orient WLHIV on SRHR and help them in all aspects. (respondent 16, age 37)
Treatment and capacity building	WLHIV groups should be oriented on women's health rights and ways to enjoy such rights, capacity building training would be good. (Respondent 9, 33)
Create working environment	For betterment of women and to empower them job should be created, so they can earn their livelihood and make their own living and do not have to be dependent on others.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The goal of this study was to gain deeper insights into the reasons and types of discrimination faced by HIV-positive women seeking reproductive health services in healthcare settings. Three significant findings emerged. First, pre-existing social attitudes, perceptions, and information regarding women with HIV form the foundation of stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings. Second, the forms of stigma and prejudice perceived or experienced by WLHIV varied regardless of which reproductive health service they sought. Finally, as a result of such discrimination, WLHIV refrains from disclosing their HIV status, delay or avoid seeking medical help, experience emotional stress, and suffer from low self-esteem. Not only do healthcare workers and service providers demonstrate stigma and prejudice in their profession, but they also reflect the perceived stigma from their communities. Healthcare workers are members of society and may hold similar perceptions. However, the same level of compassion and concern should be extended to HIV-positive women as to any other patients. They should be treated like any other mother in need of medical attention during pregnancy and delivery rather than being solely identified as HIV patients. Interventions among healthcare workers are crucial to reduce stigma and, consequently, enhance nursing care in reproductive health for HIV-positive pregnant women.

The following recommendations are made to the actors directly and indirectly involved in working towards stigma and discrimination-free health services for WLHIV at different levels:

Policy Level

Policy-level changes are imperative to bring about positive impacts in the lives of women living with HIV, particularly in relation to reproductive health and overall health:

a) Formulate new policies, guidelines, and working procedures, as the National HIV policy was last updated in 2011.
b) Develop a separate policy specifically addressing health service centers to make healthcare services more accessible and friendly for women living with HIV.
c) Establish and update ethics guidelines in healthcare centers for all staff and employees in accordance with the national HIV policy.

Management Level

Healthcare centers and programs developed by the Nepal government play a crucial role in the reproductive health of women living with HIV. Therefore, improvements are needed in the management of these areas:

a) In the new federal context, ensure that every province has HIV-centric services in provincial hospitals beyond just ART treatment.
b) Ensure that all programs are gender-specific, covering the overall issues faced by women living with HIV.
c) Implement regular training programs to equip healthcare personnel and non-medical staff with comprehensive information about HIV.
d) Incorporate sexual and reproductive health components into care and support programs and community house-based programs, facilitating the dissemination of information from the ground level to benefit women living with HIV.
e) Run programs and projects related to anti-stigma and discrimination through government channels rather than just NGOs and INGOs, ensuring the government takes accountability.

Individual Level

At the individual level, enhancing understanding of HIV, reducing stigma, and appreciating the benefits of stigma reduction among health providers and healthcare settings employees is crucial. Addressing fears and misconceptions about HIV transmission among new and practicing healthcare workers is also essential, requiring proper guidelines and laws. Regular training programs are necessary to provide healthcare personnel with comprehensive information about viral load, ART, CD4, and how HIV is transmitted, as well as how universal measures can alleviate anxieties. By sensitizing healthcare providers and separating them from behaviors considered improper or immoral, healthcare practitioners can provide improved care to women living with HIV.

Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the equal contribution in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

Funding

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

Acknowledgment

The authors thank the project advisory board for helpful guidance and suggestions.

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A Correlational Analysis of Predictor Test Results and Licensure Examination Board Performance among Education and Criminology Graduates from a Private University

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Date Submitted: October 26, 2023
Date Revised: November 5, 2023
Date Published: November 7, 2023

Originality: 93%
Grammarly Score: 98%
Similarity: 7%

Recommended citation:
Robiños, J.R., Sagudo, F., Birung, R.J., Camilon, R.B., Legaspi, J., Cacho, R. (2023). A correlational analysis of predictor test results and licensure examination board performance among education and criminology graduates from a private university. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1(2), 37-42. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2023.0019

ABSTRACT

Academic success and poor performance on national licensure examinations negatively correlate with test anxiety. Focusing on a relatively small number of graduate takers of the Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT) and Criminology Licensure Examination (CLE) from the three board courses (n= 19), the investigation determines the predictor test scores and licensure examination board performance of graduates of BEED, BSED, and BS in Criminology from a private university in Bacoor, Cavite. Moreover, it examined possible relationships between the graduates' scores in the two standardized assessments. Upon Using frequency, percentage, and Chi-squared correlation tests, the study revealed poor predictor results (32% passing rate), good percentage performance to the graduates to CLE and LEPT (rate is above the national passing percentage), and a strong positive correlation between graduates' performance and their prediction test scores (x^2 (1,19) = 6.31, p=01154). The study discovered that all students who passed the predictor test and a few who failed it also passed the licensure examinations. Results have provided necessary recommendations, such as initiatives and programs to enhance board performance further, increase linkages, reduce test anxiety, enrich curriculum delivery, and achieve the program education goals of the education and criminology departments of the humanities and social sciences cluster.

Keywords: *Correlation, Criminology, Education, Licensure Examination, Predictor Test, Bacoor, Cavite, Philippines*

Introduction

National Board examinations generally are anxiety-provoking. Extensive scholarly research has consistently demonstrated a negative correlation between examination-related anxiety and academic accomplishment and subsequent unfavourable outcomes in board performance. The presence of anxiety around assessments and academic tasks can significantly influence students' academic performance, particularly in high-stakes examinations. (Jerrim, 2023). Research has suggested that around 15% of students taking examinations experienced "high test anxiety" due to less motivation, poor wellness, pessimistic thoughts, and uncertain feelings. Moreover, a more significant reason pointed out is poor preparation and readiness (Keating, 2019). In the context of inadequate preparation for board examinations, it is common for students to need more awareness of their knowledge gaps or areas of misunderstanding until the days leading up to the examination. Despite the collective endeavours of academic administrators, faculty members, and student support services to adequately equip graduates for board examinations, specific subtopics that needed to be thoroughly addressed or emphasized emerged throughout the examination. (Flores, 2020).

The College of Education comprises two programs, the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) and Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) major in English. In UPHSD-Molino, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) recognized these programs in November 1999 and July 1999, respectively. The program education objectives for BEED and BSED focus on producing graduates that can (a) teach effectively across the curriculum and in their area of specialization, (b) integrate interdisciplinary instruction to achieve academic excellence, (c) display competence, dynamism, and global competitiveness in education; (d) manifest leadership in teaching, research, and community service; (e) exhibit comprehensive content knowledge, skills and values; and (f) demonstrate proficiency in organizational communication and practical human relation (CMO No. 74 and 75, series of 2017). Meanwhile, the CHED recognized the Bachelor of Science in Criminology in August 2013. Its PEOs highlight the (a) competence in the conduct of criminological research on crimes and crime causation; (b) internalize the concepts of human rights and victim welfare; (c) demonstrate competencies in law enforcement administration, public safety, and criminal justice; (d) utilize forensic science; and (e) apply principles and jurisprudence of criminal law, evidence, and procedure (CMO No. 5, s. 2018). All three programs under the HUMSS Cluster recently received a level III accreditation from the PACUCOA—the higher the accreditation level, the better the program quality (Prado, 2020).

Recently, the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) announced that only about 32%, 41%, and 47%, respectively, passed the April 2023 and March 2023 Criminology Licensure Examination (CLE) and Licensure Examination for Professional Teachers (LEPT). The national passing rates for CLE and LEPT are below 50%, clearly showing a gap between content knowledge, competencies, examination preparation, and other relevant factors that may hinder good performance ratings. In response, higher education institutions in the Philippines are expected to develop strategies to improve the institution's board performance (Fiscal & Roman, 2022). Varied strategies implemented to increase national board examination results are linked to conducting predictor examinations, training and workshops, home-based review classes, series of pre-licensure examinations, and conduct of research related to formulating best-fitting plans and programs (Briones & Romero, 2020; Amanonce & Maramag, 2020; Albina et al., 2021, and Fiscal & Roman, 2022). However, despite varied initiatives, some institutions have low confidence levels in ensuring well-board performance, while others have below-average results compared to a national passing percentage (NPP) which makes the study more relevant and timelier to conduct. Associations between pre-board and board exam results increases academic institutions certainty in achieving higher ratings compared to the PRC national percentage (Amanonce & Maramag, 2020 and Roman, 2022).

In the case of the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA – Molino campus, despite the above passing percentage compared to NPP in CLE and LEPT in recent national assessment and the level III PACUCOA status of BEED, BSED, and BS in Criminology, there is still a need to increase and conduct innovative efforts to increasing level of confidence of the school in terms of predicting the institution's board performance. Recently, the Humanities and Social Sciences Cluster, composed of the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Education, and the College of Criminology, has partnered with a well-known review center to give a predictor examination to its students who will be taking CLE and LEPT national examination. The predictor examination is conducted to make sure that graduates are more prepared and will observe precautionary measures and be able to pass the national board examination. The predictor examination is equivalent to pre-board. It is an educational endeavour aimed at expanding learning beyond the confines of the traditional classroom environment and enhancing overall academic achievement. The predictive nature of performance on particular items throughout the test was observed concerning subsequent recollection and overall performance on the examination. (Sense et al., 2021). The concept has something to do with learning analytics that can be used to monitor progress, guide study decisions, and prepare for better board performance among graduates.

The study is anchored to the achievement theory of motivation by McClelland. The theory centers on the imperative for an individual to undergo improvement in response to increasing experiences. Additionally, the theory emphasizes the behavioural effects of an individual's need for accomplishment, success, authority, and affiliation. (Villa & Sebastian, 2021). The motivation of individuals is influenced by these characteristics, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, or cultural background. (Siok et al. 2023; and Maharjan, 2018). In context, students who pass or fail the predictor examination may desire to pass the national board examination, which may affect their behavior. The more they fail the predictor test, the higher the possibility of observing actions that would ensure passing performance later. The actions may be relative to preparedness, commitment, initiative to attend reviews, conduct peer reviews, and purchase of review modules.

The 100% passing percentage is the ultimate goal of the Colleges of Criminology and Education. Preparation for board examinations must be given careful attention (Briones & Romero, 2020). The predictor examination also serves as a gauge to quantify the performance of the institutions in the national board assessment (Delos Angeles, 2020). Indeed, there is a need to study if the results of the predictor examination given to graduating students of Criminology and Education have something to do with their board performance. The enhancement and production of sub-initiatives to maximize the full potential of the institution's services and efforts and to produce a 100% passing percentage have driven the researchers to conduct the study. This study also facilitates the assessment of the realization of the program educational objectives of the criminology and education programs of the UPHSD – Molino Campus.

The study is based on the research agenda of the HUMSS cluster, in particular, curriculum enrichment, quality delivery of instruction and assessment, extended learning opportunities, and school culture of quality. The primary purpose of the correlational study is to investigate the association between the predictor test result and the board examination performance of the graduates of Criminology and Education programs. The study was made to a) identify the predictor test performance of the graduating students; b) determine the licensure examination performance of the BEED, BSED, and BS in Criminology graduates; and c) check if an association exists between the predictor test result and board examination performance of BS in Criminology, BEED, and BSED graduates.

Methodology

The quantitative, descriptive correlational research design was used to investigate the association between the performance of the BEED, BSED, and BS in Criminology graduates of UPHSDM in taking predictor tests and the licensure examination by PRC. The three courses were chosen because it's the program offered under the Humanities and Social Sciences Cluster and the courses included in the memorandum of agreement. The design was utilized to interpret and make inferences on the data, particularly the relationship between two variables. The descriptive-correlational design is the most appropriate and valuable when analyzing the relationship between two or more random variables within the same population or between the same variables in two distinct populations. (Sand, 2022).

Predictor examination is a standardized assessment based on the enhanced specifications table crafted for LEPT and CLE takers. It is offered by the partner review center bonded with the memorandum of agreement (MOA). The PRC prescribed the enhanced TOS. The College of Education and Criminology has no right to get a copy for intellectual property consideration. Meanwhile, board performances were provided by the PRC through the university registrar's office. No research instruments were proposed.

Necessary data were collected after the predictor test and the national licensure examinations for professional teachers and criminologists. An orientation was given to the graduating students of Batch 2022, which included the testing rationale, coverage, time limit, test mode, the possible implications of the result to prepare and make students aware of the initiative, and the utilization of the results of their assessments (predictor and national licensure examination). Students were informed of their rights to refuse, anonymity, and withdrawal rights. During the orientation with the CBRC-review partner for the standardized predictor test, consent forms were discussed and collected. However, one of the limitations of the conduct of the predictor test is the monitoring of students' health, physical strength, mental readiness, and conditions at home. Focus group discussions among LEPT and CLE passers were initiated to validate the study conclusions and implications.

The study was conducted at the University of Perpetual Help System DALTA – Molino Campus. The population comprised the Graduates of Batch 2022 who took the CLE (December 2022 = 9 takers) and LEPT (March 2023 = 10 takers). The census sampling technique was used since few graduates took the predictor exam and the national licensure examinations for CLE and LEPT.

Frequency and percentage were utilized to categorize the graduates' predictor and licensure examination performances. Moreover, the research study used the Chi-square test to check if a significant association exists between the predictor test and licensure examination performance. The examination performances are dealt with in categorical form. The categories of the variables are mutually exclusive. Commonly employed in statistical research, the chi-square test is utilized to determine whether or not non-numeric variables are correlated. (Turhan, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Predictor test performance of the graduating students

Table 1. Predictor Test Performance

Performance	Education		Criminology	
	f	%	f	%
Passed	3	30	3	33
Failed	7	70	6	67

Note: f – frequency and % – percentage

It can be gleaned from the table above that graduating students performed poorly in the predictor test. Six (6) out of 19, or 32%, passed, while thirteen (13) or 68% failed. The result shows that graduating students still need to be ready, and interventions are necessary to make graduates capable and prepared to take the national licensure examination. According to Geraci et al. (2023), accurately monitoring one's knowledge in educational environments facilitates a compelling and enlightening learning process and opportunities. Students can utilize this information to reassess and educate themselves regarding their study methods and identify areas of comprehension that require additional attention.

National licensure examination performance of the education and criminology graduates

Table 2. Licensure Examinations Performance

Performance	March 2023 LEPT		December 2022 CLE	
	f	%	f	%
Passed	6	60	5	56
Failed	4	40	4	44

Note: f – frequency and % – percentage

The table provides data on the average performance of graduates from education and criminology programs in their respective licensure examinations. According to the data presented in the table, eleven graduates of education and criminology out of nineteen, accounting for approximately 58%, successfully passed the national examinations. The outcome demonstrated the achievement of the educational goals of the program and the potential for improved readiness in completing their respective license examinations. According to Yusoff et al. (2014), one direct effect of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is the production of high-quality graduates who demonstrate proficiency in meeting program objectives. Another expression of OBE's effectiveness is seen in these graduates' performance on national board examinations. Furthermore, as Barreda and Barreda (2020) stated, a key determinant of excellent education lies in an institution's ability to cultivate graduates who can effectively pass the PRC board examination.

Correlation of predictor test results and licensure exam performances

Table 3. Result of Chi-Square Test of Correlation

X^2 (Chi-Square Value)	Degrees of Freedom	Critical Value	P-value (2-tailed)
6.31	1	3.841	0.01154

Note: The result is significant at $p < 0.05$, N = 19

According to the findings presented in Table 3, a statistically significant association was seen between the predictor test scores of the education and criminology graduates and their achievements in their respective licensure examinations (χ^2(1,19) = 6.31, p = 0.001154). The outcome directly aligns with the McClelland theory of motivation, which suggests that an individual's drive is intertwined with their pursuit of achievement. Previous studies have indicated that several factors, such as motivating beliefs, learning strategies, and assessment performance, can be influenced by past tests and experiences (Corpuz et al., 2022). Furthermore, the present findings align with the existing literature and the outcomes of previous studies conducted by Fulgado (2020), Albina et al. (2022), Johnson (2020), and Fiscal & Roman (2022). These researchers have reported that pre-board examinations and other preparatory measures significantly correlate with the licensure examination results of their respective cohorts of graduates. The utilization of pre-board assessments significantly contributed to their achievement of successfully passing the national licensure examination.

Conclusion

The findings of the predictor test suggest that graduates need more preparedness to undertake the national licensure examinations successfully. A significant proportion of the graduating students pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Criminology, Bachelor of Elementary Education, and Bachelor of Secondary Education did not achieve satisfactory results in the pre-board assessment. Nevertheless, criminology and education responders' national licensure board performances in the December 2022 CLE and March 2023 LEPT exhibited favorable outcomes. The graduates' performances in the CLE and LEPT examinations surpass the national passing percentage. The presence of a positive outcome serves as an indication that the program's educational objectives for both education and criminology programs have been successfully achieved.

Reflecting on the theory cited in the study introduction, the study's results, particularly the calculated Chi-Squared test, confirmed and corroborated the achievement theory of motivation. Students who pass the predictor examination also desire to pass the national board examination. Likewise, those who do not pass the predictor test affect their behavior and consider doing more to ensure they can pass the licensure assessment. The more students fail the predictor test, the higher their motivation and the possibility that they will implement necessary actions to help them pass the national licensure examinations.

Furthermore, a robust and statistically significant correlation was seen between the predictor test outcomes and graduates' performance in the national license examination. To enhance the performance of graduates in the national board examination, academic leaders must persist in implementing pre-board efforts and action, fostering links, and engaging in benchmarking activities. These measures aim to better equip graduates for the national licensing examination and ensure a 100% passing percentage, luckily top performing takers. Further studies may focus on assessing the implemented board performance action plan and enriching initiatives to increase board performance among graduates.

Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the equal contribution in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

Funding

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

Acknowledgment

The authors thank the project advisory board for helpful guidance and suggestions.

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A Correspondence Article: Educational Leadership Effectiveness. Is it a Matter of a Leader's Characteristics, Behaviors, or Leadership Style?

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Date Submitted: November 4, 2023
Date Revised: November 9, 2023
Date Published: November 11, 2023

Originality: 83%
Grammarly Score: 85%
Similarity: 17%

Recommended citation:
Libiado, F. (2023). A correspondence article: educational leadership effectiveness. is it a matter of a leader's characteristics, behaviors, or leadership style? *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 1(2), 43-45. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2023.0020

ABSTRACT

This correspondence article aims to discuss the components of educational leadership effectiveness and their interconnections. The study explores the significance of leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles in achieving positive outcomes in education. It also examines the impact of different leadership styles on educational effectiveness. The findings suggest that all these components are fundamental and contribute to the overall effectiveness of educational leadership. However, it is challenging to determine which component is more significant, as they are interconnected and have relative influences. The implications of this research for educational leaders and policymakers are also discussed.

Keywords: *Educational leadership, Effectiveness, Leader characteristics, Leader behaviors, Leadership styles*

Introduction

Leadership in education plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of educational institutions. Extensive research has been conducted to examine various aspects of educational leadership, including leadership models, leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles. However, there is still a need for further investigation into the outcomes of educational leadership and the interconnections among these components. This correspondence article aims to explore the components of educational leadership effectiveness and their correlations, shedding light on the significance of leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles in achieving positive outcomes in education.

The objective of this study is to investigate the components of educational leadership effectiveness, including leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles. It aims to explore the interconnections and correlations among these components and their impact on educational outcomes.

Methodology

This correspondence article is based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on educational leadership effectiveness. Various research studies, articles, and publications were analyzed to gather information on leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles and their impact on educational outcomes.

Results and Discussions

The findings of this study suggest that leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles are all fundamental components of educational leadership effectiveness. However, it is challenging to determine which component is more significant, as they are interconnected and have relative influences. Different leadership styles have different outcomes for various stakeholders in education. For example, transformational leadership positively influences teacher job satisfaction, turnover, and school performance. Distributed leadership promotes democracy and delivery in educational institutions. The impact of leadership styles on educational effectiveness is complex and multifaceted, making it challenging to isolate and define the most significant components for leadership effectiveness.

Implications

Understanding the components of educational leadership effectiveness has significant implications for educational leaders and policymakers. By recognizing the importance of leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles, educational leaders can enhance their effectiveness in leading educational institutions. For example, leaders can focus on developing their transformational leadership skills to improve teacher job satisfaction and school performance. Policymakers can also develop strategies and policies that support the development of effective educational leaders and create a conducive environment for leadership effectiveness. This can include providing leadership training programs, promoting collaborative leadership practices, and fostering a positive school climate.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that future research should continue to explore the interconnections and correlations among the components of educational leadership effectiveness. This can help in gaining a deeper understanding of how these components interact and influence educational outcomes. Additionally, further research can investigate the impact of other factors, such as timing, special conditions, legislation, and personnel qualifications, on leadership effectiveness in education. This can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of educational leadership and its outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles in educational leadership effectiveness. These components are interconnected and contribute to the overall effectiveness of educational leadership. However, determining the most significant component is challenging, as they all play a crucial role in achieving positive outcomes in education. Different leadership styles have different impacts on various stakeholders in education, and the effectiveness of leadership is influenced by a combination of these components.

Understanding the components of educational leadership effectiveness has important implications for educational leaders and policymakers. By recognizing the importance of leader characteristics, behaviors, and leadership styles, educational leaders can enhance their effectiveness in leading educational institutions. Policymakers can also develop strategies and policies that support the development of effective educational leaders and create a conducive environment for leadership effectiveness.

Further research is needed to explore the interconnections and correlations among the components of educational leadership effectiveness. Future studies can also investigate the impact of other factors, such as timing, special conditions, legislation, and personnel qualifications, on leadership effectiveness in education. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of educational leadership and its outcomes.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This research adheres to ethical standards in conducting the literature review and analysis. All sources used in this study are properly cited and referenced to give credit to the original authors and researchers.

Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the equal contribution in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

Funding

No funding from others.

Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the researcher whose work has been referenced in this study. His valuable insights and findings have greatly contributed to the understanding of educational leadership effectiveness.

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